

GARY LOCKE
Governor



STATE OF WASHINGTON
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June 6, 2003

The Honorable Hansford T. Johnson
Acting Secretary of the Navy
1000 Navy Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20350-1000

Dear Secretary Johnson:

I am writing to express my concern over an incident that took place on May 5, 2003, when a number of orcas and porpoises were spotted fleeing an area in Puget Sound where the USS Shoup, a Navy guided missile destroyer, was practicing the use of mid-frequency sonar. Seven porpoises later washed up dead, and questions have been raised whether there was a connection between the deaths and the Navy's sonar testing.

I understand there is evidence supporting the argument that active sonar can cause serious harm and even death to marine mammals, such as the joint Navy and NOAA study following a whale beaching incident in the Bahamas where at least six whales perished. The subsequent Navy-NOAA investigation found that tactical sonar being used aboard Navy ships in the region at that time was the most plausible source of the trauma to the whales. The report called for the Navy to put into place "mitigation measures that will protect [marine] animals to the maximum extent possible and not jeopardize national security."

The actual or potential impact of sonar use on Puget Sound marine mammals is a concern. On May 29, NOAA Fisheries officially listed one of Puget Sound's populations of orca whales, the "Eastern North Pacific southern residents," as depleted under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. This recent listing highlights the serious situation facing these local icons, suggesting that extraordinary care must be taken now to protect these whales while a longer-term conservation plan is developed.

I would like to have a report from the Navy on the May 5 event and would also like to know how the Navy plans on mitigating the impact of sonar on marine mammals in Puget Sound given the recommendations of the report referenced above.

The Navy has always been a good neighbor to Washington State, and we have had an excellent working relationship. I am confident we can have both a strong Navy and a vibrant marine mammal population in Puget Sound.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gary Locke".

Gary Locke
Governor

cc: Senator Marie Cantwell
Senator Patty Murray
Representative Norm Dicks
Representative Rick Larsen
Representative Jay Inslee
Representative Jim McDermott
Representative Adam Smith
D. Robert Lohn, NOAA
Dr. Jeff Koenings, Department of Fish and Wildlife
Brad Ack, Puget Sound Action Team
Navy Commander Karen Sellers, Navy Region Northwest